

12-28-1995

Conclusion: The Never-Ending Crises

Jane Leftwich Curry
Santa Clara University, jcurry@scu.edu

Luba Fajfer

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/poli_sci



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Curry, J. L. & Fajfer, L. (1995). Introduction. In J. L. Curry & Fajfer, Luba (Eds.), *Poland's Permanent Revolution: People Vs. Elites, 1956 to the Present* (pp. 1–16). Rowman & Littlefield.

Copyright © 1995. Reproduced by permission of [Rowman & Littlefield](#). All rights reserved. Please contact the publisher for permission to copy, distribute or reprint.

This Book Chapter is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts & Sciences at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Political Science by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact rscroggin@scu.edu.

Conclusion: The Never-Ending Crises

Jane Leftwich Curry and Luba Fajfer

Although the final demise of Communism in Poland was by far the most dramatic of the crises that punctuated Communist rule there, it was not the beginning or the end of Poland's transformation process. Virtually all the studies of transformations in Latin America and Southern Europe, as well as the developing literature on the changes in the communist world, have focused on the events and problems that just preceded the ending of one form of rule and the beginning of another. In the Polish case, at least, the transformation cannot be explained by the popular disaffection and the negotiations between the opponents of the regime and the Communist leaders. The "roots" of post-Communist rule are not to be found in the "topsoil" of Communism's collapse. Instead, they reach through four decades of Communist rule, the periodic "voting with their feet" Poles did when decisions and policies were far more than they could stomach, and the seeming variety of methods the leaders tried to use to compromise with their disaffected nation. It was these decades that were real parts of the transformation. They were also the molders of a "new socialist man" who would rule and be ruled in ways very different from those men and women reared in Western-style democracies. Moreover, since only Poland underwent this many revolts and periods of instability in the decades of Communist rule, its failure to develop a viable balance between elite policy and popular demands in crisis after crisis raises critical questions about how systems and populations "learn" about politics and how to work their systems. The "Polish Road to Socialism" was forged out of the cumulation of these crises. So, too, were the paths for transformation.

This book traces those upheavals and their causes and consequences. From the time this book began in 1981 until it went to press in 1995, Communist rule returned in full force and then collapsed. These essays were revised time and again to take in the new facts and revelations that came out as once-closed archives and silent leaders opened up or wrote memoirs. What we resisted doing was seeing the past in the light of the present. Instead, we hope that, in our overview, these analyses of Poland's various periods of dramatic instability are

instructive not only in understanding communism but also in understanding the transition process in which the Poles are now engaged.

What once appeared to be a reimposition of the Communist authorities' power and stability after every breakdown or partial breakdown now, in the light of the collapse of Communist rule, looks like a jumpy path of starts and stops on the road to democratization. These crises have taught important lessons not only to scholars but also the citizens of once-Communist Poland. The social and political processes created in this struggle are a unique legacy themselves, not only affecting the immediate post-Communist transition but, no doubt, determining the very nature of the new politics, economics, and society that will be Poland.

So, far, the literature that has driven Western views of the transition from Communism has been the literature on the supposed "democratization" of Latin America in the 1980s.¹ It is a literature that concludes that the modalities of transition determine the features of the new regimes and asserts that transitions to democracy are profoundly affected by the values and decisions of political leaders.² Their mistake, as this longer-run approach to system change demonstrates, was not to look at the sweep of events³: the gradual movement to democracy and the stops and starts along the almost forty-year-long road that, in retrospect, could not help shaping a new type of system. In no event, and most surely not in the last upheavals before Communism's demise, were leaders' covenants the deciding factors. Most often these upheavals were the products of mass uprisings with no prologue other than intellectual criticism of the system. Nor did any one event arise solely from the experiences of its immediate prologue. On the contrary, there was no short-run or negotiated transition to democracy. Instead, elements appeared, some disappeared, and others reappeared or were strengthened in what appeared, until the "end" in 1989, to be a process of "liberalizing" the Communist system without changing or doing away with it.⁴

¹ The most important of these works is Guillermo O'Donnell and Phillippe Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). Ken Jowitt, in his volume of essays, *New World Disorder: the Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) complains (of the period immediately after Communism fell) about "the fetishlike repetition of the phrase, 'transition to democracy' as if saying it often enough, and inviting enough Latin American scholars from the United States to enough conferences in Eastern Europe (and the Soviet Union) will magically guarantee a new democratic capitalist telos in place of the ethnic, economic, and territorial maelstrom that is the reality today" (p. 285).

² O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions*, p. 6ff.

³ Nancy Bermeo, "Rethinking Regime Change," *Comparative Politics* (April 1990), pp. 359-77.

⁴ For discussions of liberalization, see Ken Jowitt, "The Concepts of Liberalization, Integration, and Rationalization in the Context of East European Development," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 4, no. 2 (1979), pp. 79-92; and Andrzej Korbonski,

There is no denying that the level of institutional change in Poland and the rest of Eastern Europe was dramatic after 1989. Nor is it possible to link many of the institutional changes to the changes in the first three decades of Communist rule, although most of Poland's "Great Leap Forward" economically was a prologue for marketizing reforms in the late 1980s. But there is a sense of "old wine, new bottles" as one looks at the landscape of increasing alienation and disillusionment, voter apathy, and distance between the leaders and the led in post-Communist Poland. Clearly, the kind and level of "civil society" and "civil political culture" play a major role. As a well-known Polish political scientist put it, "[f]or regime breakthrough, the most important are changes in the broadly defined culture, values, domains of thinking."⁵ The experience of Communist rule and attempts to change created this "culture, values, domains of thinking" that have left an indelible mark on post-Communist Poland. Laws can change institutions; only years can change values and ways of thinking and acting. Polish politics will bear this legacy for generations.

Various revolutionary experiences have had "boomerang effects" on the new Poland, so that even though they helped to bring about the ultimate victory of the anti-Communists, they also endangered or distorted some of the revolutionary achievements.⁶ In Poland, the past periods of upheaval are as important to postcommunism as are the long years of "stable" Communism in between. They provide the stories, the symbols, the heroes, the enemies, the behaviors to be avoided and reused, and the referent points for events years after Communism ended. Their significance is far deeper even than the furor of "de-Communization," the willingness of Polish leaders to set aside pressing daily economic and social problems to examine the declaration of martial law, the shootings in the Katyn Forest, and the orders given to shoot demonstrators in 1970.

The tangled history of social upheavals that marked Polish Communist rule for forty-one years is, of course, not a simple, direct road from Stalinism to democracy (however it is defined) in which Polish society traveled as one unit. Rather it has been a series of demands, gains, and losses for each social group, for the Communist leaders, and for the rest of the society. In this, "the rules and procedures of citizenship either applied to political institutions previously governed by other principles . . . or extended to cover issues and institutions not previously subject to citizen participation" have been established, violated, and

"Comparing Liberalization Processes in Eastern Europe: A Preliminary Analysis," *Comparative Politics* 4, no. 2 (1979), p. 231-49, and "Liberalization Processes" in *Comparative Socialist Systems*, Carmelo Mesa-Lago and Carl Beck, eds. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, Center for International Studies, pp. 192-214).

⁵ Wojciech Lamentowicz, "Jaki ustoj mamy w Polsce—ankieta," *Polityka* (January 19, 1991), p. 3.

⁶ Piotr Sztompka, "Intangibles and Imponderables of Transition to Democracy," *Studies in Comparative Communism* 24, no. 3, pp. 295-330.

taken away only to be demanded and returned in the next crisis, or the next. The "rules and procedures of citizenship" are

... the *right* to be treated by fellow human beings as equal with respect to the making of collective choices and the *obligation* of those implementing such choices to be equally accountable and accessible to all members of the polity. Inversely, this principle imposes *obligation* on the ruled—to respect the legitimacy of choices made by deliberation among equals and *rights* of rulers . . . to act with authority . . . to promote the effectiveness of such choices and to protect the polity from threats to its persistence.⁷

To follow the tangled path that brought Poland to post-Communism, we must look at the various groups and their gains and losses in the establishment of the "rules and procedures of citizenship." For democratic rules and procedures were not "gained" or "lost" at any time by the whole society; rather, they were gained and lost by groups. The result has been not only the very different attitudes of groups to their rights and responsibilities as citizens but also a uniquely Polish road to transition since only in Poland were there repeated and all-encompassing crises that destabilized the whole system from the Stalinist period on.

In 1956, all citizens temporarily seized the "right to be treated" as equal. Initially, with the elections of 1956 and the activities of intellectual groups and spontaneous workers' councils, they also took on the obligation to respect the legitimacy of the choices made in the deliberations by the political rulers. Peasants were released from the domination of the state over their lands. The Catholic Church gained partial power over its own sphere of interest, if not the right to be treated as an equal with other institutions. It also publicly accepted the obligation to accept the legitimacy of choices made by the rulers and, in leading their parishioners to vote, of the rulers themselves. Public servants, even, in their abandonment of control functions like censorship, acted as though they should be equal parties in decision making.

The rulers maintained the right to act with authority by their own shift of power from one set of Communist rulers to the next. Yet, their avoidance of any renunciation of party or state power protected them from obligations to be accessible and accountable. This facilitated the rulers' retreat from recognizing the rights that citizens and groups had gained in the heady days of the Polish October.

What was left from 1956 was a sense of the rulers having been empowered by citizens and of citizens having felt empowered over their lives for a time. Liberalization for peasants and the Church was the part of this empowerment that remained for the rest of the Communist period. It, coupled with the memories of promises made and then ignored, helped maintain the pressure for further gains and the population's limited compliance with Communist laws and rules for the rest of the Communist period.

⁷ O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions*, pp. 7–8.

The 1968 crisis of intellectual battles against the government's stagnation, framed as it was in terms of anti-Semitism, was one in which no gains were made by any group; neither the opposition nor the government won. While large numbers of university students were involved and a substantial number of young professionals were able to fill the positions of the men and women who had been pushed out during the anti-Semitic campaign, this was not a mass upheaval. Nor was it one that resulted in a change of leaders, a series of promises, or even a temporary shift in policies. If anything, what was remembered by the participants in the next revolts was the gulf between the intellectuals who demonstrated and the workers who watched in 1968.

Given the direction of the transformation of Poland and the continuation of crises after this book was conceived, the story of the 1968 crisis has been left to be told elsewhere.⁸ The memory of the anti-Semitic campaign is still real in the minds of many who took over after the fall of the Communists. But the upheaval itself was different from the one that preceded it and the ones that would follow.

What it did was set the stage for the next crisis. Not only was the leaders' already minimal sense of obligation to be accountable reduced but the rulers looked so embattled and indecisive that the sense of obligation of the ruled, be they party or state administrators or ordinary citizens, to respect the leaders' policy choices was also reduced. No one claimed to have a right to be equals, but at that point to be simply told what to do was not acceptable either.

In 1970, workers did demand the right to be heard and have both economic and structural policy protecting their interests. But even at the negotiating table they were willing to accept a less than equal position. They settled for economic gains without systemic changes. Intellectuals did not openly support workers' rights or propose that workers and intellectuals be treated as equals in policy deliberations.

The Gierek regime claimed to accept its democratic obligation to be equally accountable and accessible to all members of the polity in its honeymoon stage. But, in doing this, it spoke in a language that was heard in ways very different from the meaning the rulers gave it. By allowing themselves to be understood as accountable, the regime leaders relinquished some of their claim to be able to act with the authority their predecessors had claimed for themselves. They created further burdens for their rule by promising that Poland would be a "second Japan": these promises of an economic nirvana were not achievable. Yet they were believed, creating demands and burdens the regime could not hope to fulfill.

The mini-crisis of 1976 began to reverse some of this inequity and went further to reduce the regime's claim to act with authority. Workers refused to recognize the rulers' right to make policy for price increases. They won over policy but did not reclaim their right to be heard and treated as equals. On the

⁸ Jack Beliasiak, "Social Confrontation to Contrived Crises—March 1968 in Poland," *East European Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1988), pp. 81–105.

other hand, intellectuals began to champion workers' rights to be heard if not to be treated as equals.

Throughout the 1970s, the Church sought to make special gains for itself. Only after the 1976 crisis did it begin to openly champion the citizens' right to be equals in the system—and that was done in support of intellectual dissent rather than by treating workers as equals.

The initial Solidarity period was marked by the emergence of a kind of anarchic polyarchy in which all the players sought not to be treated as equals but to get special treatment for themselves. Workers (including bureaucrats and managers), the Church, and intellectuals, each seeking not equal rights but special rights, built their demands on realizing what had been promised them in the past. They asserted their claims even as groups linked together to ensure that others' gains did not block or supersede their own.

Conversely, the rulers, in responding to the demands of individual groups and trying to preserve their power, did not claim to use equality as a principle in carrying out their obligations or rights, nor did they claim to have been part of an accountable or accessible regime. Their strategy was (1) to acknowledge their failure to wipe out the obligations incurred by past economic and social promises and (2) to attempt to buy groups off piecemeal to preserve their own power. For them, political concessions, given their past experiences at being able to reverse their promises, were far cheaper and more possible than promising economic gains they knew could not be achieved anyway.

What changed the dynamics in this situation was (1) intergroup competition over goals and (2) the opposition's refusal to depend on party leaders and their reliance on legislation. Intergroup competition pushed the system to give, piecemeal to all, the same union and free-speech rights that they had given in the heat of battle to Solidarity workers on the seacoast. The reliance on legislation was used by the regime not to prevent failures but to delay responding to popular demands as they had promised. It inadvertently began the move from citizenship to full democratization. When laws on censorship or union registration were passed, they exceeded the promises made in 1956 and 1970 for a "freer" information system and worker self-management. However unequal their provisions were, they applied citizenship principles "to institutions previously governed by other principles" and extended these principles "to cover issues and institutions not previously subject to citizen participation."⁹

The tension that developed between groups was increasingly mollified by granting groups the right to make proposals, advocate in their areas of expertise, and develop intergroup coordinating commissions. For instance, journalists and academics got the right to draft Solidarity-supported legislation on press censorship, and intellectual and professional groups formed an overarching association to coordinate all their demands and policy proposals. At the same time, the Solidarity structure in which each individual group had the right to refuse to act on

⁹ O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Transitions*, pp. 7–8.

or to ignore the decisions of central commissions remained the basic model for all groups.

Two factors stopped this polyarchic and often anarchic process, the fifteen months of Poland's 1980–81 crisis. The first was the collapse of the economy, which affected individuals no matter what their income level or position. It also made individuals depend on each other to find scarce foodstuffs and consumer goods. The resulting mini-communities became forces in themselves.¹⁰ The second block to anarchy was the declaration of martial law. It shocked virtually the entire society and demonstrated, at least for the short run, the fragility of any gains that came without total restructuring of the entire system. No claim by the authorities that they were acting to preserve the state had any resonance. Instead, the thread of the Communist ideology and its hold on the system seemed to break with martial law. Even for the half of the population that said, on public surveys, that martial law was necessary, the claims of a "worker state" and the party as "the vanguard of the proletariat" rang hollow. As party members turned their party cards in by the basketful, the ideological justifications for the system fell away from both the leaders' presentations of themselves and the populations' perceptions of what made the system work. Raw power, Soviet intervention, and popular apathy came to be the justifications for Communist rule.

Direct connections between workers and their former intellectual compatriots were also broken by the apparent failure of Solidarity and the raw force of martial law. The defeat of martial law remained the only universal goal for Poles. But the power of this goal was clouded by the fact that even the Jaruzelski elite called for its end. Communist rulers sought to relegitimize themselves by offering to accept the obligation to implement policies equally, to expand citizen participation, and to apply citizenship principles to previously excluded institutions. They also increasingly downplayed their rights to act with authority.

The reality was that, consciously or not, the rulers had no choice but to take the avenue they did. Citizens increasingly reduced their contacts with the system. They either did not work productively or entered into private work outside the system. They simply ignored the regime and its rules. As time went on, the various groupings in the system began to make their own rules in the patterns of their actions. This all happened even as the formal Solidarity movement became weaker.

By 1988, underground Solidarity was essentially aboveground but without any real power to lead. On the other side, the regime could not deny its own paralysis. Both sides saw each other's weaknesses and sought to counter their individual loss of power. The solution for both was to hold the roundtable talks and demonstrate their ability to make mutual gains or grant mutual concessions. This forced both sides to try to establish the broadest possible coalitions and treat all groups as equals. Initially, the Solidarity side limited its demands to what it was sure it could win with the full support of the society: the relegaliza-

¹⁰ Janine Wadel, *The Private Poland* (New York: Facts on File, 1986), p. 230.

tion of Solidarity, a goal achieved in form if not in law by the fact that Solidarity picked the members of the opposition side of the roundtable talks. The government sought to undermine Solidarity's leadership by granting far more than Solidarity had ever sought. Neither was prepared for the reality of the Communist authority's unpopularity or the Soviet Union's tolerance, so both sides limited their demands and planned for a publicly Communist-dominated, if really freed, political system.

The breakthrough in the elections made the old, if ignored, reality of the sham of Communist rule clear. Elite compromises and pacts lost their power when the votes were counted and the Communists had lost resoundingly. The pact within the opposition to stand firm against the Communists was fragile. The pact between the Communist Party and the "allied" parties that had tolerated Communist dominance for forty years was even more fragile: once there was another coalition partner, the Peasant and Democratic parties went to it. The shock of the victory was so great that it seemed even more significant than it would have seemed under normal circumstances. It sent shock waves through Eastern Europe that aroused other populations as well.

There was also a real pressure for legislation to transform the institutions. The economic crisis and the potential for real suffering and increased inequality resulted in an overwhelming sense of pressure to create a political and legal system that guaranteed not only that the rules and procedures were extended to cover all issues and institutions but also that they would apply to all equally. This was good for all but the leaders of the Church and the old Solidarity. For them, there was an inherent right of rule that was based on how hard they had fought Communism in the past. It gave them a right that they could exercise among the elected elites but that had little appeal to the rest of the population.

In sum, democratization in Poland has not been a one-year process or even a ten-year struggle but was the culmination of thirty-three years of small moves forward and backward on the road to *de-authoritarianization*. The potential for success at every point was affected as much by the memories of partial gains and the earlier paths of unequal grants of citizenship rights and responsibilities as much as it was by some conscious pact process or the dynamics of any given moment.

Democratization in Poland was also not a move from a functioning and controlling authoritarian leadership to a democratic one. The leaders in Poland did not simply lose their will to rule and control, as democratization theory would have it. Nor did they simply misjudge the situation and give away their powers in a vain attempt to ensure their existing powers by co-opting the opposition. The realities of the rule of the Communist authorities from the 1970s on were hardly consistent with communist ideology or with Western images of "Communist rule."

No leader in Poland since 1956 has come to power without another leader's being ousted in order to placate the populace. Polish leaders, then, have not had honeymoons. They have been put almost instantly in the position of being appointed to placate popular disaffection and reassert the party's control.

The *modus vivendi* that has been used over and over has been a simple one: promise change for the better, make symbolic links to the populace or groups in it, and quietly strengthen institutions of control.

No leader in postwar Poland has felt secure enough in his rule to openly defy the populace and exert open control and force by killing off opposition leaders or engaging in ongoing and large scale repression. Even Stalinist party chief Boleslaw Bierut was slow to risk jailing the Church's top leaders or holding show trials complete with death sentences. (After all, Stalin himself had said that the Poles were unrulable.) All of this has meant that no leader brought up through the ranks of the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP) ruled with a sense of security. Instead, the party history they knew was one littered with failed leaders and failed policies. In their rule, then, they all made policy sure in the knowledge that they would face failure sooner or later. Promises of change and the leaders' wariness of the irresolvability of the demands coming to them from both sides—from other party elites for control and from the populace for them to fulfill often unachievable promises—paralyzed them before any honeymoon period was over. The disaffection they faced on both sides discouraged them from trying to be either popular or strong in the end.

Thus the leaders inadvertently precipitated their own overthrow. They rewarded themselves in their isolation with more and more "perks" (however petty many of them were) and allowed those around them to do the same. In doing this, they lost touch with popular feelings and experiences. They disillusioned early supporters by failing to follow through on their policy promises. Years into their rule, the leaders even lost interest in hearing about their regime's failings. Ultimately, top leaders abandoned their rule long before they were ousted. For them, it was much easier to step aside and let others make decisions, as Gierek essentially did in 1980. In the end, lower levels in the party and state leadership went their own way and simply had opponents watched, not openly confronted. Since no turnover of power brought a bloodletting among the elite, the stakes were never high for battling within the elite to keep power.

In this way, the leaders each precipitated the next crisis and their own ouster. The "opportunity costs" of opposition were reduced. Even if the elite around them looked unified, as Gierek's did in early 1980, they too were sucked into this pattern of either claiming victory and retreating or attempting to build their own empires and avoid dealing with problems on the "outside." Policy drifted and was made without regard for the whole picture. Prices were increased or policies changed in a way that challenged the disillusioned population to rise up. It did. Leaders were switched. The old ones held on to their perks and life went on. Only the next leader faced a less trusting population and a surer knowledge that his rule was not permanent.

More important, though, than the top leaders' self-destruction and retreat from their own power were the attitudes of lower-level elites—the gatekeepers and front men for the rulers. They were the ministry officials and party bureaucrats who actually made policy. Their vices were not all that different from the

party leaders', but they could not deny failures or totally isolate themselves as the top leaders tried to do. In crises, they tended to sympathize and even join in attacks on the system, except when they themselves were under attack. The revolts of 1956 and 1970 were, though, somewhat different. In 1956, the censors did attack their own institution and disband themselves, only to return to work because they needed the money. In 1970, many of those who had moved into their jobs in 1968 relished Gierek's criticism of past inadequacies and promises of rational policy based on specialists being involved in decision making.

As these crises built up, bureaucrats, in one way or another, retreated to protect themselves. They went to their work places and went through the motions of doing their jobs. When it was possible in the late 1980s, some retreated into private industry. All of this decreased their will to rule and the population's perception that the system was working. Changing regimes and promising a change of direction did not mean much, either, to the population.

The obvious question is then, Why was there police violence against demonstrators in 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, and 1981 if the will to rule was lost? The answer seems to be that it was the "police's job" to use violence. The use of violence reflected the distance between the rulers and the ruled. The rulers, by the time they used violence in 1980 or decided not to use it in the strikes of 1988, no longer had the desire to rule. Their goal was damage control. Often too, the repression was directed not by the top leader but by those around him who wanted to preserve their power and improve their chances of rising to the top. Whatever the motive, in all of the crises in Communist-era history in Poland, the violence was limited; ultimately the rulers gave up to others rather than continue the battle. The martial-law incident was the apparent exception, in which repression was carefully planned. There were no other Communist leaders in the wings of the establishment who were perceived as viable alternatives able to get public support and maintain control.

At the same time, martial law was also a last resort, one that had been put off since the spring of 1980. From the perspective of the leadership, the West and the Soviet Union both were pressing them to "get control." This time, though, they had no ready way to do so; there were no alternative leaders or policies with public credibility waiting in the wings. The distance between the rulers and the ruled, as well as the Jaruzelski leadership's remoteness from the desire to rule as opposed to simply holding on to power, was equally clear. The imposition of martial law was virtually the end of their planning. Their apparent assumption was that the public and the external forces pressing on Poland would be satisfied enough to retreat if the Solidarity "disruption" were ended by the interning of Solidarity's leaders. The failures of the past were dealt with by the interning of Gierek era leaders as well. Beyond this, there was really no alternative plan. The leaders seemed comfortable with the vague notion that they would continue with "reform" without this extra disruption.

Jaruzelski and the elites who surrounded him seem also to have sought ways to retreat from the martial law they imposed. Having lost the control they

thought martial law would give them, these leaders moved to get a grasp on those they were trying to rule and to reach out to the "friendly opposition" by drawing in anyone from the "loyal" opposition who would join them in the consultative councils they set up. Clearly, repression and pure control were not the modes of rule they wanted to use. Instead, the Jaruzelski circle either tried to ignore popular opposition or to co-opt it.

By the end of the 1980s, there was still no alternative leader in the wings of the Communist establishment to whom power could be passed to garner at least temporary public support. Nor was there any support internationally or domestically for any attempt to use force to get back the power that the Communist party felt it had once held. So the Communist leaders tried a variation on the old mode of passing power on. Since they saw the Solidarity leadership as being weakened by years of not being able to deliver gains to its erstwhile supporters, Jaruzelski and the "soft-liners" around him saw them as co-optable. Drawing them in would be a way to pass power on to another group without having to give up Communist control. They instituted the roundtables with the hope that, in the face of popular pressure against the regime that was not under Solidarity's control, they could negotiate with Solidarity and the rest of the opposition as equals. What they sought was a compromise pact over which both sides could say and feel that they had won. The establishment of a presidency and a freely elected senate was perceived at that point as a way for Jaruzelski to reassure the Soviets, even as he retreated from direct power by sharing it and maintaining a "heroic" position for himself.

That things went further and faster than they were expected to go is an anomaly of historical currents and also a reflection of the leaders' lack of a real desire to keep control or even the appearance of ruling. It is also a reflection of the fact that neither they nor those below them were functioning and controlling elites (or even thought of themselves as such) when the final crisis began.

Unlike other countries in the theoretical picture of democratization charted by Western scholars from the Latin American and Southern European experience, democratization in Poland was never a purely elite process. From the first of Poland's crises, *mass* action and *mass* demands were triggers for change in every crisis except that of 1968, when intellectual battles combined with internal party assaults. Of course, the Polish masses were not the masses of Latin America or even Southern Europe. They tend to be universally educated in a system that taught them, directly, that they were important forces and, indirectly, that they could have little real impact on the system and should focus on their own individual needs. The combination of Poland's historic ties with the West and the curiosity triggered by censored media made them acutely aware of the world around them. And, although the possibilities for social mobility from the working class to the white collar class or actual leadership and managerial positions really ended in the early 1960s when Poland's economic transformation slowed, workers were imbued with the ideology that theirs was a workers' state.

The limits set on upward mobility when Poland's industrialization drive slowed down effectively separated the worlds of workers and intellectuals. It set workers apart from even the party and state leaders who claimed to have come from working-class stock but who had been in the party or state bureaucracy for so long that they no longer even had empathy for "workers." Furthermore, while resolution of the crises of 1956, 1968, and 1970 reflected links between intellectuals and rulers, the later two crises reflected the emergence of a new elite from outside the intellectual centers of Warsaw and Cracow, the Gierek elite, that never really made links with Poland's traditional circles of intellectuals. As a result, intellectuals were neither drawn into elite battles, as they were in 1956 and 1968, nor were they unwilling to involve themselves in worker battles with the Communist rulers as they were in 1970. Instead, in 1976, 1980, and 1989, intellectuals were separated enough from the party and state elite that they were willing to align (although never as equals) with worker activists. So, in 1976, 1980, and 1989, there were added intrigues: the regime sought to separate workers and intellectuals by playing to workers and discrediting their intellectual supporters, while intellectual dissidents sought to help (with the Committee in Defense of the Workers, KOR, in 1976), to advise as they did in 1980, and to cooperate with and provide expertise for workers as they did at the roundtables in 1989. Throughout all of these intrigues, though, the line between workers and intellectuals—dissident or ruling—remained. Neither group's plays were effective. When change came in every crisis, it came as a result of worker action and not elite trade-offs. When the common "enemy" of communism was vanquished, the alliance then fell into a class battle that fragmented further and further down.

Peasants were the missing group in the crises after 1956. That was the crisis that ended farm collectivization so definitively that it never reentered the policy framework. The peasants' part in the crises of Poland came from the impact of their work on the market: the price as well as the presence or absence of agricultural products on the market always played a large part in popular assessments of the regime. Price increases on agricultural goods triggered all of the crises but 1968. To the party elite, the peasant class remained the most immutable group in Poland. No elite dared to try to "communize" them. At the same time, the devotion of the regime to industrial priorities and the reluctance of any Communist regime to justify "private peasants" meant that the state policy on agriculture did nothing to encourage agricultural production even though it depended on that production for its hold on power and its ability to make Poland economically functional.

The presence or absence of active mass support determined the winners and losers as well as the content of negotiations. This meant that the negotiating process did not preempt mass demands but was determined and spurred on by them. For the opposition, the censorship and direction of the media and other controls made them mythical heroes, if they were known, but it did not allow them to have their ideas known or to build trust. The distancing from the popu-

lation and real exchanges this caused was evidenced, most clearly, in their surprise at the shipyard strikes in 1980.

In 1956, 1970, 1976, 1980, and 1989, mass actions began the movements for change. Only in 1968 was the crisis precipitated at an elite or intellectual level and then used by the internal party battles. In 1956, workers' spontaneous strikes in Poznan broke through the elite wall. What followed was less a process of negotiation than of conversation in which the entire urban population participated and to which the party elite reacted by bringing in Wladyslaw Gomulka as a popular symbol. Trusted by the population as a rebel in the party, Gomulka was also trusted by the de-Stalinizing elite as a man who could be counted on to return order without undue liberalization. Negotiations in the traditional sense of compromise between groups with different program alternatives simply did not occur. The two sides talked only when the elite searched for ways to rally mass support against what they saw as a potential hard-liner coup. The significance of mass action is also clear in the reluctance of Gomulka to back down on his "granted compact" with the peasants and the Church and in the ease with which he did back away from intellectual gains.

In 1968, pacts were also negotiated at the top. The battle in the leadership was between two groups of Communists. But this was not a crisis of the ruled and the rulers. It was a crisis that marked individuals as "good" or "bad" among their intellectual compatriots. This also made it hard for intellectuals to feel the commonality with workers required for them to have joined in "their" battle in 1970. All of this made this crisis quantitatively and qualitatively different enough to be excluded from this discussion even though the Moczar party faction played on the traditional nationalism and anti-Semitism of the population in the hope of creating a mass base.

After this upheaval, the Gomulka elite retreated on all but its promise of returning stability for the rather massive state and party administrative corps. At the same time, the Gomulka elite tried to hold on by making initial moves to improve the economic lot of the population. Both were clearly playing to the masses. For both, the intellectuals were tools and symbols of "mass potential" but not critical actors.

In 1970, intellectuals and the intelligentsia were, at the least, secondary actors. Workers organized themselves and fought for economic and political rights. Intellectuals and white-collar professional elites—at either end of the ideological spectrum—played no real role. Workers had not sided with them in 1968, and the price increases, proportional salary hikes, rapid replacement of Gomulka, and promises of Gierk for change based on "consultation" with them were all to their liking. Divisions in the party elite had long existed. All sides, when faced with mass fury, attempted to placate the workers again by bringing in a new face to whom the population had looked as a "good leader." In the process, the white-collar "masses" were bought off by the suggestion that they would have a voice in policy.

All of Gierek's promises succeeded in raising popular expectations. They did not succeed in solving Poland's problems or in achieving any real "consultation" or sense of "inclusion" it to the intellectuals and intelligentsia in policy making. As a result, when the same problems had to be dealt with in 1976, there were no new solutions, only a greater sense of alienation among the white-collar class. Therefore, although the Baltic seacoast workers who had brought down the Gomulka regime remembered their past disappointments enough not to take the risk of opposition in 1976, intellectuals were willing to marshal their resources to help workers. A core group of them, plus a larger contingent of individuals prepared to donate money to the cause, did this by forming a Committee in Defense of the Workers (*Komitet Obrony Robotnikow*, KOR) that first collected money to provide legal fees for arrested workers and support for their families.

Once they had organized to help arrested workers, intellectuals continued the KOR organization and expanded it to include publications and education as well. From this, the structure for popular action changed dramatically. No longer was it simply an *ad hoc* organization triggered by elite actions. It became an ongoing, if small-scale, force to educate the population and create an alternative base to "lead" the wider population to think through the moral alternatives to Communist rule. This became the first and, ultimately, the biggest and most complex of the dissident organizations that would press for change within the Communist system in Eastern Europe and make links with the West to ensure ongoing concern in the West for human rights issues in these states. Its reach was not great enough for it to be credited with "making" the changes in the 1980s. But it certainly provided a ready and visible alternative elite.

The 1980s were a time of worker-intellectual alliances in Poland. But, from 1976 on, intellectuals' role meshed with workers' leads: they set up committees to protect workers who had already taken action in 1976 and, in 1980, they entered the shipyards and were told they were welcome to consult as to how workers could best achieve their goals; still, they were not to tell workers what to do. In 1989, their role was dependent on Lech Walesa. Even in the elections, intellectuals were, by and large, the parliamentary candidates for Solidarity. They ran as *worker* Lech Walesa's candidates, not as individuals with programs and leadership potential. Even Walesa's nomination of his once intellectual advisor, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, as prime minister was, for Walesa, not a ceding of power to him or to intellectuals but the creation of a tolerable "front man" for these initial years. When he would not cede power to Walesa, Mazowiecki himself became an expendable class enemy for Walesa's group.

Conclusion

The history of Poland's crises is one that demands a rereading not only because the events of the last forty years are the base of the events that brought down Communism in 1989 and that shape the destiny of post-Communist Poland but also because Poland's crisis history challenges old patterns and expectations from other times and other world areas. It demands that we look at events, actors, and processes as interwoven parts of a cloth and not as discrete events and factors. At the same time, to understand Poland today, we must understand not just the final downfall of Communism—it was a *fait accompli* before it happened—but also the failed revolts, reforms, and attacks on it of the forty years before.

They are the legacy on which this “new” polity is being built, both in the economic and political infrastructure that is “Poland” today and in the concerns of the leaders and the led alike. After all, among the biggest draws in the book market in Poland and among the key “new” sources for these chapters have been the memoirs and secret documents of leaders and events from Poland's Communist past. For the people of Poland, the Communist era was and is a crucial measure of individuals and of options even now that it has ended.

These crises are also realities on which theories of politics, Communist rule, and change should be based. What is clear is that such theories were good as topographical maps but not as road maps. They laid out the dimensions of Poland but not the direction of change for what remains a land of crises.

Poland's pattern of politics through crises did not end with Communism's demise. Nor were the lessons learned in the previous thirty years set aside. Poland's formal transition out of Communism was faster than that of any other country in Eastern Europe. But, on many levels, little changed—not only because basic human behavior is hard to change but also because the “Communist” system had already been worn away by the stops and starts of crisis resolution since 1976. In its place, an *ad hoc*, inchoate political, economic, and social system had developed and existed inside the loose restraints of “communism.” Once the restraints were dropped, the system lost some of its boundaries but none of its significance. So, the “new” Polish polity found itself dealing not simply with replacing the Communist system but also with adapting the *ad hoc* system that had grown up when Communism did not work either to control people or to please them.

This made the transition from Communism far from smooth. People have tolerated economic losses that would have sent them to the streets in earlier years, but, politically, stability has been elusive. The pattern of democratization elsewhere—the formation of parties, the establishment of compacts limiting political conflict, and the relegitimization of institutions—did not occur in Poland in the initial years after Communism was halted. In fact, democracy and capitalism rapidly lost their luster.

Instead, although the system functioned and major economic reform was carried out, bringing with it real economic losses for the bulk of the population, the politics of Poland were marked by a fluidity complicated by continual crises in the political sphere as well as the legacies of the crises of Poland's past.

The Polish revolution, after all, did not start in 1989 or even in the denouement of martial law. It began more than three decades earlier. The crises that began in 1956 and recurred periodically from then on politicized and organized not only the intellectual strata of the society but also and, perhaps, most importantly, its working class. As a result, large numbers of people learned political action by being involved in various antigovernment activities, in comparison to the other East European countries that had been rocked at most by one societal crisis involving a far smaller part of the population than the repeated Polish crises did. What this taught Poles was a learned opposition to politics and politicians, as well as a pattern of being politically active by being opposed to the government. It also helped, in the last two decades, to forge links between intellectuals and workers in which workers were powerful even though intellectuals were better positioned to get their specific demands fulfilled.

In the process of this long-term political mobilization that involved a schooling of virtually the whole society, a Polish political discourse that was high on symbolism and low on pragmatism was established.¹¹ Such political discourse continues today in Poland's plethora of minuscule parties and long debates over procedure rather than over the pressing policy issues of the day.

This stylized political discourse is even more apparent in the use of the symbol of "de-Communization" as opposed to the institution of real action against former Communist leaders and elites. After all, Polish Communists were far more willing to give up than to repress crisis after crisis, so it is hard to blame them for the hardships of communism. At the same time, their tenacity in holding on and returning systems in upheaval back to a fragile but real *status quo* gives the stability in the bureaucracy far more significance as a real sign that little has really changed.

The result of this symbolization or oversymbolization of political discourse has served to reinforce the Communist era rift between the governors and the governed. The population, even now that "its" movement and "its" heroes have won, still sees itself in opposition to the government. True, the elites are unable to satisfy the high expectations people brought with them to the post-Communist era. But there is more to the dramatic disillusionment that Poles have voiced about their freely elected leaders, their sense that these leaders work for their own personal interests or those of their group and their sense that "politics" is, at best, "dirty business."

The legacy of seeing oneself in opposition to the government is still at play. The "us" versus "them" sense is as much a part of Polish politics now as it was in the crisis-filled Communist era. The initial euphoria of victory did the

¹¹ Jadwiga Staniszkis, "Forms of Reasoning as Ideology," *Telos*, no. 66 (1985-86), pp. 67-80.

same thing for the Polish population in 1989 that it did for it in 1956, 1970, and 1980: it created a sense of victory and of being empowered among the population with accompanying expectations that are, perhaps, far greater than elsewhere in Eastern Europe where there was no buildup of crises.¹² High expectations made, as they had in the past, the failure of the government to fulfill its promises all the more alienating. As a result, after the Communist era, Poles began to follow the same pattern as they had followed in the past: a withdrawal from politics and political participation in general and into the private sphere or other social activities. At the same time, the Poles' sense that the government "owes" them remains strong.

Where the parallel has stopped, so far, is at the precrisis stage: Poles have accepted more losses this time than they tolerated with the Communists. In part, this may be simply a reflection of all the new mechanisms that are available to them: In the past, when elections were structured and not really competitive, Poles "voted with their feet" and ousted their leaders. Now, Poles go to the polls and vote out their leaders, election after election. The difference is that the number of people who make even this small effort decreases with every election.

To predict the trajectory of the future of any transition after its initial three or even five years is risky at best. But the repetitiousness of the factors and actors in the crises that have "made" Polish politics and their consistency in the post-Communist era have, at least, created some sense of an imperative direction of change or of politics itself. One assumption they do prove false is that "[t]he shorter the first stage of the transition, the more protracted the second stage of the economic transformation and democratic consolidation."¹³ After all, the ebb and flow of gains and losses in Poland's crises and the transition they created over three decades of movement out of Communism was the most explicit and longest breakdown period. The old links formed in the Communist-era movement from crisis to crisis fell apart rapidly once the main goal of Solidarity and the society it represented was achieved: Communism fell. New actors took over the political arena, divided not by opposition to anything but by more subtle issues: whether the move out of Communism should be fast or deliberate, whether the system should focus on the rule of law or the rule of the majority, and whether the priority of the governors should be on remaking the society or providing it with the material goods and services it had sought for the last forty years.

In the Communist period, because the changes were most often piecemeal or promised and never achieved, Communism and the battles against it did nothing except to create a politicized but alienated population and a laundry list

¹² Sztompka, "Intangibles and Imponderables of Transition to Democracy," pp. 295–330.

¹³ Laszlo Bruszt and David Stark, "Rethinking the Political Field in Hungary: From Politics of Confrontation to Politics of Competition," *Journal of International Affairs* 45, no. 1 (1991), pp. 201–45.

of changes that were institutionalized before they were completed or coordinated. As a result, although the *ancien régime* was more prepared than any other in Eastern Europe to give up its power, there was no leadership to receive it. The same forces and problems that challenged the old Communist regimes now challenge the new government. The road is, at best, rocky. Poland, after the Communists, rocks from crisis to crisis, each escalated as before with symbolism rather than actual decision making as its motor.

Thus what we witness is a polarization of transition politics, coupled with an increasingly widespread political apathy and the same kind of gap between the leaders and the led that characterized the Communist era—except that this time, for the first time since the late 1940s when the Communists took over, the leaders are men and women who came from the led. They do not represent particular electoral groups any more than the men and women of the Communist-era elections did. Instead, while they talk with the same rhetorical grandeur of the nation's interests, this time it is not about a movement toward Communism but about a transition from "Communist rule to democracy." The conundrum remains of how, even when a system has proved over and over that it can rally but not win, one moves from one political and economic system to another and leaves behind the behaviors and promises burnished in by repeated crises and partial victories for every actor.